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Reflections on: Gar Alperowitz, The Use of the Atomic Bomb And the Architecture of an American Myth (Knopf, 1995)

Distinguish between the "decision" (universal (?) readiness at high levels--even Bard and Eisenhower?--except for the Chicago scientists (and Leahy's private views? unexpressed before the event) "to use the Bomb if necessary to end the war, without or if necessary with an invasion"

and the definite decisions (by Truman and Byrnes) that tended to make its use "necessary," i.e., to reject all those initiatives that might plausibly have made it unnecessary by ending the war earlier than the Bomb would be available.

Strictly speaking, even these decisions by Truman and Byrnes did not make use of the Bomb "necessary...to end the war without invasion" since it was still possible to give warnings and assurances on August 5, or later if the use of the Bomb were postponed for this reason or other reasons. It was never the case before August 6 or August 9 that these alternative initiatives had been tried and failed, leaving the Bomb as the only remaining alternative to invasion. (On August 9, the Soviets actually entered, and it is not at all clear that it did fail then to produce a tentative surrender; its effects are conflated with the effects of dropping the two bombs, especially the second one on the same day).

(Almost surely, the Emperor was prepared to intervene--which was the key to breaking the deadlock--before news of the second bomb. That was in the mind of the man (Kido?) who scheduled the meeting; and that was triggered by news of the imminent Soviet entry. (Sigal). Or did it follow from Hirohito's reaction to the first bomb, even earlier than news of the Soviet entry? (Walker) Anyway, was the Emperor prepared to do this, intervene, even before the first bomb? (Probably, if the US had offered to modify UCS, directly to the Japanese, perhaps as early as May 28 when Grew proposed it (might this then have truncated the fighting on Okinawa?) or on July 2 when Stimson proposed it, or by Potsdam, July 24; or if there had been warning of Soviet entry, at Potsdam or earlier. Even a July 24 assurance would have allowed time to save the sailors on the Indianapolis).

Thus, the earlier "decision" might better be described: "to use the Bomb as soon as it became available, if the war were still in progress."

The decisions by Truman and Byrnes assured that the war would still be in progress when the Bombs became available, between August

escape: even in the case of small incidents of massacre).

Of course, when physical removal by forced emigration is done under conditions that lead to large-scale deaths, it can amount to a means, a process, of physical extermination. Intent may be in some question; the evidence of intent may be ambiguous. This is still true, for example, of the Bataan Death March (like the shooting of prisoners--as in Israeli wars in 1956 and 1967--not regarded as genocide), but also of the forced removal of the Armenians by the Turks (still argument over whether the mass deaths were intended by the Turks) and the Trail of Tears removal of the Indians, both generally regarded as genocidal.

If "political group" is included, as in the original definition, then the annihilation of Polish elites by the Nazis would be a case, and of Polish officers by the Soviets (Katyn). In both cases, the objective would be "cultural genocide," the destruction of a group (larger than those killed or subject to a project of annihilation) as a cultural group with an organized structure or a group identity, and in particular, with autonomy or independence or privileged status.

Thus, the destruction of educated elites, very broadly construed, in Cambodia by Pol Pot: to subordinate the masses in the interests of transforming their cultural identity (toward isolation and non-urbanization); the forced emigration from cities and towns in Cambodia, with mass deaths.

This purpose can be seen as the permanent subordination of a class or national or ethnic group. Indeed, it could be akin to "pacification"! See the Phoenix Operation, aiming at "cadres," or the broad leadership elements of the nationalist/Communist opposition (where Communist can be seen in cultural as well as political terms). Or: removal to concentration camps, "strategic hamlets." Death squads in Central and Latin America. And the earliest formation of classes as a result of conquest and the subordination of the previously-dominant population (probably usually accompanied by the cooption or extermination of earlier elites). In the Babylonian Captivity, was it not the priests and elites who were transported to Babylon, leaving the farmers to be assimilated and subordinated?

Probably most physical removal, even by forced emigration, results in a considerable degree of "cultural genocide," whether or not it is associated with mass death along the way. The flight of Cambodians from areas being bombed between 1969-75 amounted to a mass disorganization of the society; also making it fertile soil for domination by the fanatic Khmer Rouge organization, and subsequent cultural transformation (and genocide, or politicide).

Another political aim of mass killing could be forced conversion, as of the Jews in Spain (and later elsewhere), under

the Inquisition. (Emigration might be another alternative). This too would accomplish cultural genocide.]

July 2: Another concept would be: mass murder with intent to exterminate--or to drive out, by terror--all or as many as possible." [This would be "ethnic cleansing," as in former Yugoslavia.]

This is the usual purpose of genocidal campaigns, according to Eric Markusen. Thus, he sees the Holocaust as an exceptional case, perhaps unique. (As suggested above, his broader definition--which actually makes no reference to political intent at all, including removal--may not really correspond to the way the term "genocide" is usually used). Thus, by his application of the term (which is consistent with the legal definition of "genocide" but perhaps not to the usual usage) they are a type of terrorism (to accomplish a political purpose).

This presumes that victims can flee. This was not the case after 1939 (?) in Germany and Europe: no nation would take the Jews. Yet, that seems to be the determining reason that Hitler turned to extermination; earlier, there was no attempt to keep Jews in Germany so as to exterminate them later. Still, once decided on, the Holocaust did not have this characteristic (to cause flight): although there was willingness to trade Jews for resources, e.g. trucks.

In either case, the desired result is "ethnic cleansing," as in Bosnia: which declared purpose is presumably why the Bosnia massacres are perceived as genocide. Cleansing comprising only expulsion, or without mass murder (and intent to kill or harm/rape as many as possible?) would probably not be called genocide, though it might be called "genocidal" and might amount to "cultural genocide" (which is not a concept in general use).

E.g., Israeli killing at ---- in 1948, with intent of causing Arabs to flee from Israel, would fit definition, except, perhaps, for intent to kill all or as many as possible. (Cleansing was desired, and nearly achieved.)

The Old Testament massacres ordered by God were pure examples of ethnic cleansing! Genocide! (God's commands did not encourage or even permit flight, forced emigration, or conversion; or even surrender! Pure extermination, to empty the territory of the Promised Land to Jewish immigration.

Consider: a willingness and readiness/capability to kill all in a territory, if someone --e.g., their leaders--do not meet demands. (Non-combatants, in all this discussion).

Armenians: massacred (or dead) in the course of a forced

flight: like Bataan Death March, or Indian Trail of Tears, Removal.

Indians in Santo Domingo, killed or died out after Columbus.

Indians in North America.

[All these cases are mentioned in NYT today, article on "original ethnic cleansing" in America...

Ambiguities inhere in the definition, "killing all or part of..."

Still, there is a special horror to fact that Jews couldn't get away, couldn't flee, couldn't get out of Europe (largely a factor that others wouldn't take them!) To what extent, when, how, were they restrained from flight? Inability to emigrate; then, intent to annihilate them. (Actually, first they were transported, "to East"; indeed that was the cover story, for them and their neighbors. "All" that would happen to them was expulsion, transport (and then, probably, hard labor, perhaps under dangerous conditions. again, the German practice was unusual, of working them and feeding them on a level that was intended to kill them fairly soon. a "waste" of labor, by most standards; but there were plenty more coming, and Hitler wanted them dead. Was it even efficient to use them as a work force at all? given low nutrition and energy, and the logistics of using them only for short periods...?

After all, massacres, mass murder, did not occur at all in sight of the Germans, or even the Poles and other East Europeans. All of that was secret, behind barbed wire.

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But the bombing, too, had its peculiar horror! Again, no way to flee--unless out of the country, and that was no easier than for the Jews! (Could Germans leave? Japanese?) See Fisher on LeMay's intent. And use against 67 cities as quickly as possible, to avoid development of countermeasures that would reduce the number of deaths. An extermination technique.

See expectation and willingness to use ten or more atomic bombs. And prediction that invasion would cause as many civilian deaths, or more, as the half million killed already. (Compared to 46,000 US military KIA?)

(See Ambrose's acceptance of Leahy's estimates.)

How can Americans accept their false version of history? Or believe in "American decency and innocence"? Well, look at those who believe in O.J. Simpson's innocence! (These are the same Americans--Afro-Americans--who find it easy (more plausibly) to believe in a conspiracy by white American police. Like those who believe that "Sixties revisionist historians have cooked and

distorted the historical evidence on Hiroshima decision-making," rather than that officials and "authorised histories" from the Forties and later did the cooking of evidence).

September: But could they also accept the real history, if it were forced on their awareness? Perhaps soA!

I suggested to Jerry Brown, in discussion before being interviews on his program two days ago, that if Hiroshima were to be seen as justified--as it is by most Americans--then in historical context they would have to see it as the first justified massacre. What earlier massacre, I asked him, was broadly seen as "necessary" and legitimate?

"The extermination of the Indians," he answered immediately. "After all, we couldn't leave the country to them, could we?" I had to agree with his example, which of course extended to the general destruction of "primitive, indigenous" peoples by "advanced" cultures (still going on, e.g. in Brazil, Paraguay, Guatemala...). My proposition should have been limited to "massacres of non-primitive people." And even this must be limited further, if the massacres are not to be seen as justified. Just War constraints did not apply to "infidels," as in the Crusades, or massacres of heretics.

Morning thoughts, September 3, 1995, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The rationale offered and generally accepted for the attacks on Hiroshima is far from the worst that might have been accepted, in terms of its implication for values and for future threats and actions. I.e., "saving a much larger number of lives, both American and Japanese" both limits the acceptable future use of nuclear attacks, and does less damage to American values and identity, than other proposed legitimations or "reasons, justifications" that might have been generally accepted, and which in fact were proposed as acceptable reasons by many Americans:

A benefit of atomic attacks, a reason for using them, an acceptable purpose of using them is to:

--Exterminate the Japanese. As many as possible should be used (or should have been used) before they surrendered. And/or acceptance of their surrender should be delayed until more have been used, or they have been annihilated.

--Exact humiliating and bloody revenge for Pearl Harbor, and punishment for their other atrocities.

--Avert any further deaths of Americans, no matter how small:

e.g., 46,000, or 26,000; or the small number involved week by week in August and September; or, "one American." Never mind about Japanese casualties; in fact, Japanese casualties have negative cost (see above).

--See how they work, on cities and people. Test weapons: in air drops, in "actual conditions." Especially the plutonium bomb, untested at Trinity, to be the mainstay of any nuclear force, and the largest part of the Manhattan Project cost.

--Scare humanity (the US? the Russians? both very implausible!) into accepting international control.

--Intimidate the Russians.

--consistent with using the bomb: end the conflict before the Russians got in very far (reason for wanting bomb before August 8-15 and with using two bombs fast).

--[Control the postwar world! not just vis a vis the Russians. This is emphasized by no analyst--even Gar--and not discussed a lot by officials at the time; yet there are some hints of it, in Byrnes, Truman and Stimson.

Desire for prolonged monopoly didn't just represent fear of Russians.

Gar and Kai Bird in Foreign Policy did analyse the various effects on the Cold War--e.g., acceptance of the division of Germany, willingness and ability to rearm Germany...[look at my analysis of Iran/Gulf/ME oil, FU threats...]

Were these effects incentives before dropping the bomb? Were they foreseen?

--Avoid making explicit to US public USG willingness to keep the Emperor.

--Service motives: let the Air Force win the war, quickly. (This motive in the Air Force was countered by unease at the force implications of nuclear weapons: till Russia was seen clearly as the urgent enemy, against which preparedness must be directed).

--Holding down defense budgets, preparedness, in the future (the motives for Eisenhower's New Look. A rationale for demobilization postwar.

--Basis of a postwar anti-Russian posture and strategy. (Groves, from 1944 at least): an affordable one.

--Preventing world war, for fifty years or more (at some risk of catastrophe! as before World War I, the pre-WWI "system",

including "preparedness" (including mobilization plans). [If you want war, prepare for preemptive war). [Would it be said: If you want war, prepare for peace"?]

Any of these, if advanced and accepted by the American public as adequate justifications for the attacks (as they all were accepted by various US officials) would have had even more dangerous consequences for US strategies and values. And the fact that they were not advanced is evidence that their acceptance by the mass of the public was not taken for granted: an official recognition of a gap between the public and officials in values and priorities and constraints.

A defense of "urgent, overwhelming necessity"--in terms of saving human lives--was advanced and accepted; not just a cost-benefit calculation (or, as in USG, benefits without costs).

Of course, this example shows how easy it is to construct a specious argument of necessity and to maintain it for half a century--when the audience is not critical or adversarial, and has a desire to believe the official account. Still, it is hard not to grant at least the hypothetical possibility of a necessity justification for almost anything; what is needed in every case of a purported justification of an extremely destructive or dangerous act or policy is a stringent, skeptical examination of all the elements of the defense, above all on the alleged unavailability of better alternatives.

Another thought: How was it that a more elaborated coercive strategy was not conceived or pursued with respect to Japan? Already in Italy, there had been an "on-off" pattern of bombing, according to Ernest May, which had been more "effective" than a steady bombardment. And why was not acceptance of the Emperor made contingent on quick surrender: even before Okinawa, and certainly after it? Why no deliberate, limited, "demonstration" attacks on the Imperial Palace and command centers? (Accidental attacks in May apparently had much greater influence on the court officials than the devastation of the rest of Tokyo).

Suppose that invasion had not been considered as an option at all. For example, suppose that it had definitely been ruled out as far too costly in American lives: as it should have been--and probably would have been--if the estimated deaths had really been in the neighborhood of 100,000 or half a million, let alone a million!

(One could even imagine--but this would require a different American public and government and/or a different era--that the prospective loss of life of Japanese civilians could be so great as to rule out an invasion. For example, suppose that the Japanese

population was really expected to commit mass suicide rather than accept individual or national surrender and occupation: as on Okinawa. A massive Jonestown, or Masada. This is actually what a lot of the American public had been led to expect, after Okinawa (though top officials knew better, through the intercepts). Should the US really have contemplated occupation under such circumstances? Is there no limit to acceptable civilian casualties in pursuit of victory? (This would correspond to the danger that hostages would be killed, or prisoners. Well?)

In the actual circumstances, Americans probably would have accepted extermination of whole populations "if absolutely necessary" (as Truman put it in his August 9 letter to Senator Richard Russell), at least as a prospect. They might well have sickened of it in the course of carrying it out, whether by invasion or by repeated atomic bombing.)

OK, invasion is out. Then, the casualties inflicted by atomic bombing would not be calculated against "American lives saved" by averting invasion. They would have to be measured and justified against the costs associated with alternative policies, such as waiting for or warning of the Soviet entry and assurances to the Emperor, and prolonged blockade. (Continued conventional bombing was another alternative, though one that posed no moral dilemma compared to atomic bombing). Or, against further modification of the surrender terms. Or, against the other motives above.

(Since invasion was not much expected by July by high officials, even without knowledge or consideration of atomic bombing, this is the way the issue would have appeared to officials at the time, if it had been raised at all (as it was not) reflecting a high-level concern that use of the bomb presented some "costs" or drawbacks and was therefore problematic.

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 July 2, 1995
 September 3, 1995

July 2, 1995: How Holocausts Happen. Hyp: that the word genocide is used to denote: mass murder with the intent to annihilate--or as many as possible--people of a certain category within a given territory. (the elements of intent to annihilate all or as many as possible, and within a given territory, are rarely specified; but they seem to be part of determining how the term is applied or rejected)

[Sept. 2, 1995: another element, as the word is usually used: "without the intent to achieve any other political purpose, other than extermination"; in particular, "without the intent to achieve removal from a territory by means other than extermination, as, by flight or forced transportation; indeed, perhaps with transport--except to concentration camps awaiting extermination--forbidden and prevented."

This use of the term describes the Holocaust. Indeed, it may be unique to the Holocaust. Thus, to specify this element has the effect of limiting the use of the term "genocide" to the Holocaust, within historical experience so far. That would recommend this definition to those Jews who wish both to stress the uniqueness of the Holocaust, its unique horror, and to limit the use of "genocide" to this one case.

But this motive is not the only determinant of this limiting definition. It probably is in the minds of most users of the term, including non-Jews who lack this motive, since their sense of the term is shaped by the Holocaust case, the first use of the term and the first case of "genocide against 'modern,' 'Western' people" in broad Western awareness (the extermination of Armenians having dropped from consciousness--as Hitler observed--along with use against indigenous colonized people).

Indeed, there is a case that there is a peculiar horror to "extermination without the possibility of flight or survival by surrender or conversion." It might be called, "removal--from a territory, 'ethnic cleansing' of a territory--'with prejudice': i.e., without the possibility of return, or of 'breeding' outside the territory, which might threaten either return of the heirs of those removed or their instincts and acts of revenge."

(Recall the instincts of the GVN General Staff to kill Ngo Dinh Diem instead of letting him escape; they feared he would be a rallying point for Vietnamese against them, and would be driven to avenge his brother's death. Likewise, I believe, some Nazis feared that if Jewish children were spared or Jews allowed to escape after the extermination began, they would be future enemies, dangers. There is also a general fear of allowing witnesses of massacre to